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Pattern of conferences

Pattern of conferences

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report contains information on conference management issues pursuant to General Assembly resolution 65/245 of 24 December 2010 and other relevant mandates, as well as on initiatives undertaken by the Secretariat to improve the quality of conference services provided to Member States. Information is summarized to the extent possible in order to keep the report succinct and within the word limit. Statistical data are provided as supplementary information, which is available from the website of the Committee on Conferences.[a]

* A/66/50.

[a] See http://dgacm.org/CoC_Report_of_the_SG_on_the_pattern_of_conferences_(A-66-118)_Supplementary_information.pdf.

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I. Meetings management

A. Calendar of conferences and meetings

1. Requests for exceptions to section I, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243 of 18 December 1985

1. Requests to meet during the main part of the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly have been received from the Committee on Relations with the Host Country, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Disarmament Commission, the Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the Independent Audit Advisory Committee, the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the second intersessional meeting of the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (see supplementary information, sect. I). In accordance with established practice, the requests will be reviewed by the Committee on Conferences for recommendation to the General Assembly.

2. Draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings for 2012-2013

2. The meetings planning system (g-Meets) of the integrated conference management system (i-CMS) initiative is currently in production in all conference-servicing duty stations (New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi). G-Meets comprises two modules, launched in 2010 and 2011: (a) an assignment module for interpreters (e-APG) and (b) a meetings planning and scheduling module (e-Meets). The capability of generating a global electronic calendar of conferences and meetings through e-Meets is being developed as part of a road map of enhancements to g-Meets, which is expected by the end of 2011. The draft biennial calendar for 2012-2013 was prepared with the assistance of e-Meets.

3. The provisional calendar of conferences and meetings in the economic, social and related fields for 2012 and 2013 (E/2011/L.10) was reviewed by the Committee on Conferences on 24 June 2011 and its comments have been transmitted to the Economic and Social Council for consideration at its 2011 substantive session (E/2011/128).

4. During its substantive session, the Committee on Conferences will review the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings for 2012-2013 (to be issued as A/AC.172/2011/L.2) and transmit its recommendations to the General Assembly. The draft biennial calendar will appear as an annex to the Committee's report to the Assembly.

5. **The General Assembly may wish to include in new legislative mandates all relevant information in respect of meetings and documentation in order to enable the Secretariat to fully assess the conference-servicing needs, which could have programme budget implications. Meetings for which no modalities have been determined are listed in the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings for 2012-2013. The Secretariat will report to the Assembly in accordance with rule 153 of its rules of procedure when the modalities of those meetings have been agreed upon.**

3. Intersessional departures for 2011 and related matters

6. The Committee on Conferences approved a request received in 2011 from the Commission on the Status of Women and two requests from the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations to hold an additional meeting at the conclusion of their sessions, and from the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters for a change of venue from New York to Geneva. The Committee noted that the Fifth Committee would require an additional meeting to complete its work at the second resumed session.

B. Utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

1. Analysis of meeting statistics of United Nations organs

7. Starting in 2011, g-Meets is being used to record statistical data on all meetings held at the four duty stations and away from established headquarters in a harmonized manner so that meaningful data comparison and analysis are possible across duty stations. Statistical data for the past three years on the utilization of conference resources allocated to a core sample of bodies that met in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi were collected from g-Meets and is contained in table 1, section II of the supplementary information. The table also includes statistics on the percentage of pre-session documentation issued four and six weeks before the beginning of the session/consideration of the item and the availability index by week.

8. The overall utilization factor for all four duty stations in 2010 was 85 per cent (86 per cent in 2009) (see supplementary information, sect. II, table 2). For New York, the slight decrease to 81 per cent in 2010 from 84 per cent in 2009 is the result of the cancellation of 16 per cent of meetings and the ability to reassign only 61 per cent of the interpretation teams. Comparatively, in 2009, 13 per cent of meetings were cancelled, for which 65 per cent of interpretation teams were reassigned. It is not always possible to reassign interpretation services to other meetings, especially when arrangements are made at the last minute. In the case of Nairobi, the drop in the utilization factor is attributed to the inability to reassign the only cancelled team. The percentage of meetings programmed versus meetings held for all meetings with interpretation in New York increased from 96 per cent in 2009 to 97 per cent in 2010 (see supplementary information, sect. II, table 7). Section II of the supplementary information contains comparative statistical data for the past three years on the utilization factor (table 3) and meeting ratio (table 4).

9. Proactive planning by calendar bodies when preparing the semi-annual projections of meetings, together with periodic monitoring of planned meetings for any changes to the programmes of work, has led to a significant increase in the planning accuracy factor (see supplementary information, sect. II, table 5). The overall planning accuracy factor at the four duty stations increased to 88 per cent in 2010 from 84 per cent in 2009, with New York recording a significant increase, to 82 per cent in 2010 from 77 per cent in 2009 (see supplementary information, sect. II, table 6).

10. Data on the number and percentage of all meetings programmed and held at the four duty stations (including the core sample) are shown in section II, table 7, of the supplementary information.

11. In New York in 2010, three intergovernmental bodies had a utilization factor of less than the benchmark of 80 per cent for three consecutive years (see supplementary information, sect. II, table 1.A): the Committee on Contributions, the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization and the Statistical Commission. As requested by the General Assembly, the Chair of the Committee on Conferences will hold consultations with the bureaux and secretariats of those bodies and will report orally thereon to the Committee at its substantive session. It is noted that as a result of more accurate planning and early cancellations, which allow for reassignments, the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and its Working Group improved their utilization factor to 93 per cent in 2010, above the benchmark noted in the previous report (A/65/122, para. 12). In Geneva two intergovernmental bodies had a utilization factor of less than 80 per cent for three consecutive years: the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee and the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Consultations with the substantive secretariats are held as necessary, and monitoring letters are sent on a regular basis to draw the attention of the organizing secretariats to the planned and actual utilization of conference resources.

12. **The General Assembly may wish to reiterate its request to intergovernmental bodies to review their meeting entitlements and to plan and adjust their programmes of work on the basis of their actual utilization of conference-servicing resources in order to improve their efficiency in using conference services.**

2. Provision of interpretation services to the meetings of bodies entitled to meet "as required"

13. A comparative analysis of the provision of interpretation services to meetings of bodies entitled to meet "as required" in New York shows a slight decrease, from 95 per cent in 2009 to 94 per cent in 2010, which is due to the conflicting demands of requestors and last-minute changes in the meetings programme in cases where advance planning is not possible (see supplementary information, sect. III).

3. Provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States

14. The statistical data are broken down by regional and other major groupings at the four main duty stations for 2010 (see supplementary information, sect. IV). In New York, 96 per cent of the requests were met in 2010 (87 per cent in 2009) owing to improved planning on the part of Member States and the meeting planners. In Geneva, 80 per cent of the requests were met in 2010 (87 per cent in 2009), with the reduction resulting from the increase in the calendar meeting workload (the utilization factor for Geneva rose from 88 per cent in 2009 to 91 per cent in 2010).

15. The United Nations Office at Vienna does not normally receive requests to provide interpretation to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States, and did accommodate 100 per cent of requests for meetings without interpretation services. At the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the regional and other major groupings of Member States did not request interpretation in 2010, although the Office has the capacity to provide such groups with interpretation.

4. Utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi

16. In 2010, all meetings of Nairobi-based bodies were held in Nairobi, in conformity with the headquarters rule.

5. Utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa

17. In 2010, the conference centre hosted and serviced 4,777 meetings, which represents a utilization rate of 70 per cent (76 per cent in 2009). The decrease is due mainly to the fast-growing number of hotels and government conference halls recently opened in Addis Ababa, which provided non-United Nations organizations and corporations with alternative venues at which to hold their meetings, as well as the cancellation of meetings by regular users of the conference centre. This more competitive situation has led the Commission to embark on a more robust and innovative marketing strategy to increase its occupancy rate.

18. The marketing activities of the centre included participation in high-profile international conventions and exhibitions, including the worldwide exhibition for incentive travel, meetings and events, held in Frankfurt, Germany, and the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), held in Hyderabad, India. The centre was featured in the annual publications and websites of these two well-known global organizations in the conference and exhibitions market, as well as in "Meet in Africa", the member contact directory of the ICCA Africa chapter, Association Meetings International, the Worldwide Convention Centres Directory and the Ethiopian Airlines magazine *Selamta*. The centre has strengthened its ties with the Government of Ethiopia and other key stakeholders through the creation of a joint marketing strategy committee, which aims at promoting both Addis Ababa and the centre as a conference and tourism destination in Africa.

C. Impact on meetings held at Headquarters during the implementation of the capital master plan

19. The Department continues to face challenges in servicing and accommodating the many ad hoc requests in excess of the core activities of calendar bodies. Constant interaction with the secretariat of the capital master plan minimizes disruptions to the intergovernmental process.

20. The higher security standards and the resulting need for better blast protection have meant that conference rooms 1, 2 and 3 on the IB level of the Conference Building will undergo an extensive design change. The gallery seating has been relocated to the east wall and the podium to the west wall. The rooms are no longer at the window line and therefore are smaller in footprint by some 2,000 square feet (186 square metres), but the delegate seating capacity has not been affected. Consequently, the projected date of completion has been revised to December 2012. An updated chart showing the availability of conference rooms during the remaining phases of the capital master plan is contained in section V of the supplementary information.

21. To facilitate flexible working arrangements, the Department has provided some 700 Mobile Office licences to translators, revisers, editors, Secretaries of committees and conference officers. Mobile Office provides a secure way of gaining

remote access in real time to many of the Department's information technology resources and allows staff to work from anywhere at any time.

II. Integrated global management

A. Status report

22. Under the proximity rule, now formalized for all meetings away from headquarters, a team that involves the least cost for servicing such meetings is assembled, and the documents are translated remotely in the headquarters location where the secretariat of the body organizing the meeting is located. To ensure the assembly of the most cost-effective team, the costs of using staff from different duty stations, including regional commissions, and freelancers are compared and the least costly arrangement is used, with replacement costs, available capacity and quality assurance duly considered. The benefits of this arrangement include financial savings for both the Organization and host countries, and it offers opportunities for staff from different duty stations to familiarize themselves with practices elsewhere so that the service mode can evolve through the promotion of best practices.

23. The proximity rule is but one of many facets of integrated global management contained in the Compendium of Administrative Policies, Practices and Procedures of Conference Services, which was amended to reflect developments since its latest revision, in 2007. The revised version includes comments and input from the Department of Management and the Office of Legal Affairs. A new section on the policies, practices and procedures of the Protocol and Liaison Service relevant to conference services is being prepared for inclusion in the Compendium.

24. The widening spread and acceptance of jointly practised common work procedures, policies and rules for major conferences and meetings away from headquarters, together with steady progress in the development and increased utilization of the integrated conference management system, is laying a solid foundation for the evolution of integrated global management. It is not only a means for the efficient allocation and utilization of the Department's tangible resources, but also a means for the realization and sharing of intangible benefits, including knowledge and expertise and lessons learned, which is a prerequisite for adding value and ensuring economy of operation and the efficient use of the Department's resources. In this vein, the 2011 coordination meeting of conference services managers focused on actual experiences and lessons learned from the application of the proximity rule, with a view to arriving at recommendations for policies and suggesting ways for improving practices.

25. In response to the request of the General Assembly in section III, paragraph 15, of its resolution 65/245 of 24 December 2010, the Secretariat has undertaken a comprehensive review of conference management efficiency and accountability mechanisms across the four main duty stations under the auspices of its Management Committee, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, with a view to exploring the boundaries of meaningful authority and establishing acceptable

protocols for exercising such authority within existing mandates[1] and organizational structures and the reform framework, with due regard for the accountability of the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management to the Secretary-General for enhancing and facilitating the effectiveness and efficiency of the total process of intergovernmental activities and his responsibility for guiding integrated global conference management involving Headquarters and the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, including the establishment of conference management policies, practices, standards and procedures and the allocation of resources under the relevant budget section, vis-à-vis the operational specificities of the duty stations. The Secretary-General confirms the principle of accountability and shared responsibility for conference services at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi between the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management and the three Directors-General. Harmonized amendments of the Secretary-General's bulletins on the organization of the three Offices will be developed to delineate and codify the dual responsibility for the conference management operations of the Under-Secretary-General and the respective Directors-General.

B. Performance measurement

26. The four conference-servicing duty stations have, through intensive discussions, reached consensus on standardized key performance indicators and basic costing methodology. Data entry at the four duty stations through the statistical data reporting system of i-CMS (g-Data) will be fully aligned and the comparative performance reported, with a view to producing reports on key performance indicators that are comparable both over time and across duty stations, enhancing transparency and accountability. The financial reports are already being used actively. By mid-2011, all planned reports will have been developed and posted. At the time of preparation of the present report, many had already been tested and signed off on by the users.

27. The performance matrix for 2010, which provides indicators for human resources, meetings management and the timeliness of documentation, as well as productivity measures for the language services, is contained in section VI of the supplementary information.

[1] As early as 2001, the General Assembly recognized the need to recalibrate the Department's relationship to the conference management components of the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi. In paragraph 81 of its resolution 56/253, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to ensure that conference services are managed in an integrated manner throughout all duty stations in the Organization, and in sect. II, para. 3, of its resolution 56/242, it requested that the Department be considered the executive authority to oversee, coordinate and enhance the global management and delivery of United Nations conference services. In 2003, the Assembly requested that the responsibilities in management matters be clearly defined as well as delineated between the four conference-servicing duty stations (resolution 57/283 B, sect. II.B, paras. 7 and 8). In 2009, the Assembly emphasized the need for programme managers, and duty stations resourced under section 2 of the programme budget, to be cost-effective and efficient, particularly with respect to the effective functioning of the global management of conference services, and requested the Secretary-General to develop mechanisms that would enhance accountability in this regard (resolution 64/243, para. 67). This request was reiterated in 2010 (resolution 65/245, sect. III, para. 15).

C. Evaluation by Member States of the quality of conference services

28. In 2009, the survey of conference services was harmonized across the duty stations, and common indicators were established. The global e-survey was promoted and distributed to Member and observer States at the four duty stations by means of an e-mail message with a link to the survey, a note verbale by the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, announcements and links in the *Journal of the United Nations* and all relevant websites and promotional activities at each duty station. Besides indicating the ratings of services currently provided, the global e-survey also seeks to elicit feedback on improving the quality of the services. Written comments and complaints are collected and distributed to each responsible office, and lessons learned are drawn for the effectiveness of future surveys. In 2010, the global e-survey was carried out twice, in May and November, during a period of four weeks and five weeks, respectively.

29. Despite the Department's various efforts, the response rate for the e-survey was disappointingly low. Only 137 responses were received at all the duty stations for the May 2010 e-survey, of which 38 per cent rated the Department's services as "excellent" and 5 per cent as "poor". A total of 130 responses were received at all the duty stations for the November 2010 e-survey (40 per cent "excellent" and 5 per cent "poor"). Poor ratings were due mainly to difficulties experienced in finding information in the calendar of meetings.

30. In 2010, the Department in New York held two rounds of informational meetings with delegations on the quality of language services, in April and October; the Division of Conference Management in Geneva conducted three informational meetings, in July and December; the Conference Management Service in Vienna conducted two informational meetings, in April and July; and the Division of Conference Services in Nairobi held two informational meetings, in February and March. In addition to the regular survey on conference services, the Department maintains a database to capture ad hoc feedback on the quality of its services.

III. Matters related to documentation and publications

A. Documents management

31. The document management system (g-Doc) of the i-CMS initiative was relaunched in March 2011 with a view to integrating features of the systems at Headquarters and in Geneva in common work processes, thereby reducing the need for local customization. The workplan contains, among other things, a common document submission module that includes harmonized slotting and forecasting to allow for advance tracking of documents by intergovernmental bodies and author departments alike.

32. During the reporting cycle, further progress was made in the area of proactive document management, with the slotting system being implemented at all four duty stations. This led to improved performance in some areas, while impediments persisted in others. In New York, for example, the overall rate of timely submission of slotted pre-session documents for the first five months of 2011 reached 87 per cent, showing marked improvement over the levels of 2009 (73 per cent) and 2010

(78 per cent), and demonstrating that the 90 per cent compliance benchmark is achievable. At the same time, the Department in New York maintained 100 per cent processing compliance: all documents submitted on time and within the word limit were processed within four weeks. Consequently, 83 per cent of slotted pre-session documents were issued within the mandated time frame, compared with 76 per cent in 2009 and 82 per cent in 2010.

33. The interdepartmental task force on documentation, comprising all author departments, has been meeting twice yearly, once in the second quarter, focusing on documentation for the Fifth Committee, and again in the third quarter, in two segments: the first targeting all submitting departments and offices and the second dealing specifically with documentation for the Fifth Committee. In the meetings, which have always been well attended and conducted in an interactive and action-oriented manner, participants are briefed on new legislative mandates and operational guidelines, and lessons learned and ideas for improvement are exchanged. The practice of holding task force meetings has generated interest at other duty stations as well. In addition, the senior managers of the Department were closely involved in the slotting exercise, both in New York and at the other duty stations, and interacted frequently with the heads of author departments and presiding officers of intergovernmental bodies.

34. The improved compliance with submission guidelines is attributable to the joint efforts of author departments and the Department, with the latter having made dynamic and robust efforts to monitor and follow up with author departments on their submission schedules, targeting author departments that repeatedly failed to meet the 90 per cent benchmark, especially in those cases where the work of intergovernmental bodies was seriously affected by the late issuance of documents.

35. While the overall submission rate has improved steadily, performance varies among author departments: in 2008, 27 departments out of 48 (56 per cent) reached a compliance rate of 90 per cent; in 2009 that figure dropped to 23 out of 51 (45 per cent), and in 2010, it increased slightly, to 25 out of 48 (52 per cent). Therefore, the Department will enforce more rigorously the slotting system, including through the use of the "footnote clause" as mandated by the General Assembly.

36. At the Division of Conference Management in Geneva, the online planning module was fully deployed in 2010. For the cycle covering July 2011 to January 2012, all author entities have submitted their forecasts using the system. For the first time ever, OHCHR submitted a forecast for all Human Rights Council documentation, as well as that of the treaty bodies, although the latter remains much less predictable, as it is based mainly on submissions from Member States. Still, the Division of Conference Management will hold discussions with the treaty body secretariats with a view to slotting those documents that are within their purview. It needs to be pointed out that, despite the considerable flexibility exercised in recognition of the specificities of the Human Rights Council, namely the staggering of submission dates in accordance with the schedule of consideration of agenda items, the compliance rate has remained well below the 90 per cent benchmark. For the Economic Commission for Europe and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, which have successive overlapping short meetings and large amounts of documentation, the only way to deal with their workload continues to be strict adherence to the 10-week rule.

37. The Conference Management Service in Vienna has been implementing the slotting system since 2003, and in 2005 the system was incorporated into the electronic workflow in the Documents, Conference and Production Management System. The total number of parliamentary documents slotted at the United Nations Office at Vienna for 2010 was higher than in the previous year, and those documents were included in the electronic forecast submitted by the client secretariats twice a year and updated regularly. The Service has been engaging in dialogue with the secretariats and the bureaux of the governing bodies in order to reach agreements on alternative time frames when, owing to the dynamics of the intergovernmental bodies concerned, flexibility is required, in particular for documents of Vienna-based bodies that do not lend themselves to the 10-week time frame.

38. The United Nations Office at Nairobi has applied the slotting system to all of its clients. However, regular budget clients account for only 30 per cent of its total volume of documents, while the level of compliance has been very low among extrabudgetary clients, for whom the 10-week rule may be applicable to a small number of specific documents only. In most of those cases, the Office managed to suggest alternative slotting schedules based on the ad hoc requirements of the governing bodies.

39. One of the major initiatives in the documentation area is the slotting of pre-session documents for the Security Council. The Department and the Council secretariat have agreed on the conceptual framework and have worked with author departments to develop a slotting template and to start negotiations on the dates of submission and the length of documents. At present, only reports submitted directly to the Council are slotted; because of their complex nature, reports submitted to sanctions committees and panels of experts will be dealt with in the next phase of negotiations.

40. Workload-sharing in the context of global document management remains ad hoc in practice and negligible in amount, accounting for less than 1 per cent of the global workload. The main reason is that there is little surplus capacity, given that all four duty stations forecast substantial capacity shortfalls throughout the year compared with expected work inflow, leaving no room to shift workload. Capacity at the United Nations Office at Geneva, for example, has been inadequate for a number of years, and its translation backlog continues to grow.

41. Waiver management is conducted mainly through proactive advance intervention. Proactive waiver management takes place at the slotting stage, whereby the Department seeks to contain the length of slotted documents while taking into account justification provided by author departments and historical patterns of similar or recurrent reports. This exercise has consistently produced significant results. In 2010, the number of words in manuscripts was reduced by 421,145 words (about 1,300 pages) through interaction with author departments in New York.

42. The Secretariat has published versions of some sanctions lists in the six official languages of the United Nations, for example in the cases of the sanctions regimes in connection with Somalia/Eritrea and the Sudan. Since the previous substantive session of the Committee on Conferences, the consolidated list of the committee monitoring the sanctions on the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been made available in the six official languages, and the consolidated lists for the

Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire sanctions committees are expected to follow suit in the near future.

43. Furthermore, the relevant committees have decided to make publicly accessible on their websites, in the six official languages, narrative summaries of reasons for the listing of all entries on the Al-Qaida and Taliban lists. In total, 483 such summaries have been approved, leading to the creation of nearly 3,000 separate pages created for this specific purpose in the six official languages.

B. Processing schedule

44. The General Assembly, in paragraph 24 of its resolution 46/190 of 20 December 1991, urged the Secretary-General to take the necessary measures to ensure that pre-session documents for meetings were distributed no less than six weeks before the meetings, and in paragraph 8 of its resolution 47/202 B of 22 December 1992, the Assembly urged the substantive departments of the Secretariat to comply with the rule requiring them to submit pre-session documents to conference services at least 10 weeks before the beginning of sessions in order to permit processing in time in all the official languages. The Assembly thus effectively allocates four weeks for the processing of documents submitted within the word limit.

45. Because of time pressure, a manuscript most often is processed simultaneously on three paths: (a) editing of the original, (b) referencing for all target languages and (c) translation into all target languages. Parallel processing, although often unavoidable, is inefficient and time-consuming.

46. Maximizing sequential workflow, in which manuscripts are edited, formatted and finalized in the original language before being sent for translation, is a precondition for efficient workflow automation, which, in turn, would enhance quality, speed up certain processing stages and reduce the overall processing time for certain documents.

47. Cost efficiencies can be realized by changing the workflow from parallel processing to linear processing and by re-engineering the workflow to increase automation at each processing stage. Re-engineering the workflow for verbatim records is under way, as discussed in section D below. The related issue, increased sequential processing, could be accomplished by increasing capacity at the upstream stages or by adjusting the current paradigm to give the Department six weeks for processing rather than the current four. As documents are now available electronically in all official languages significantly sooner after their finalization, a six-week review period may no longer be necessary.

48. **The General Assembly may wish to amend the rules governing document processing to a 10-6-4 time frame, whereby manuscripts would be submitted to the Department 10 weeks and issued 4 weeks before consideration. This change would ensure the availability of documents well before their consideration and would provide for greater efficiencies and enhanced quality of documentation.**

C. Printing of parliamentary documents and capacity utilization

49. During the past few years, the Department has reduced considerably the number of printed pages of parliamentary documents — by 41 per cent (50 per cent

in New York) — even though both the number of documents handled by the Department and the number of manuscript pages processed have increased, by 6 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively, at all duty stations (7 per cent and 17 per cent in New York) from the levels in 2008. For example, 43 million page impressions were produced in May 2009, 18 million in May 2010 and 5.3 million in May 2011, for a total decrease of 80 per cent. As part of its strategy to encourage alternative means of distribution of parliamentary documents, the Department has introduced various electronic tools to enable users to access documents online. The average number of hard copies printed in New York is now more in line with the average at the other duty stations.

50. The downward trend of page impressions is expected to continue as cost-effective and environmentally friendly alternatives become more available and more widely used. The reduced space in the conference rooms for document booths and the lack of storage space for documents in the North Lawn Building have compelled the Secretariat to reduce the distribution of documents on the premises and to compensate with increased reliance on electronic distribution. As delegates and the Secretariat gain more experience with paperless meetings, this mode of meeting should be strongly encouraged.

D. Re-engineering the publishing workflow for verbatim records

51. The Meetings and Publishing Division in New York has been developing, for the preparation of procès-verbaux of the Security Council, a fully digital workflow that handles the entire process, from content creation (verbatim reporting) through revision, layout and formatting and output in many digital forms (PDF, e-Pub, etc.). The workflow employs many tools to streamline the process (reference and digital translation tools, formatting templates and productivity scripts and macros). The workflow also allows for leveraging global resources: a test for connecting the New York and Nairobi duty stations to share the workflow was conducted in mid-2011.

IV. Matters related to translation and interpretation

52. Energetic measures are required to avoid a disruptive shortage of applicants in language career fields, especially given the large number of language staff expected to retire in the coming years. When projected retirements in the period from 2010 to 2016 are factored in, total turnover will reach 43 per cent for interpreters and 40 per cent for translators. In absolute numbers, this means that competitive examinations will have to produce 119 new recruits for interpretation and 217 for translation in the period in question.

53. The Division of Conference Services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi still faces challenges in attracting and retaining qualified language staff despite various efforts and in collaboration with other duty stations in filling the posts. The proposed upgrades of six Reviser posts and five Interpreter posts from the P-4 to the P-5 level in the 2012-2013 budget is key to solving the problem of attracting and retaining qualified staff.

54. The Department has conducted a comprehensive review of the language competitive examination process, in close cooperation with the Office of Human

Resources Management. An expert panel with representatives from the Department and the Office is considering a range of policy issues related to the conduct of language examinations and the management of rosters. An online roster management module was launched that allows programme managers to access and share information about candidates on the roster awaiting recruitment on career appointments. The Department is considering a number of proposals aimed at expanding the pool of qualified applicants and simplifying the process by standardizing and streamlining the form and content of the examinations without compromising their high standards.

55. Increased reliance on freelance interpreters as a short-term remedy has proven to be an unsatisfactory alternative. All duty stations have faced, to varying degrees, challenges arising from the unavailability of freelance interpreters on short notice, fierce global competition for their services and the fact that the conditions of their temporary employment at the United Nations are not as competitive as those offered by other institutions. The four duty stations agree on the need to increase in-house capacity and to widen the pool of local freelance interpreters where applicable (New York and Nairobi). The Department is leading negotiations with the International Association of Conference Interpreters, conducted within the framework of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, on a solution to the problem of uncompetitive rates, particularly in North America. New York and Geneva are also of the view that avoiding simultaneous peaks in their respective work programmes would allow for more staff exchanges, thus further reducing the need for such recruitment.

56. Training and outreach together constitute a cornerstone of the Department's long-term succession planning. By offering training opportunities, the Department ensures that the specialized competencies needed to carry out its daily work are maintained and developed by upgrading and updating the substantive and technical knowledge and skills of its current workforce. Through its outreach efforts, the Department aims to attract new talent through direct collaboration with training institutions, and it ensures awareness of its needs and requirements through a language outreach portal.

57. The outreach to universities programme is aimed at addressing the shortage of qualified candidates to meet increasing needs in the language services. The network of training institutions that have signed memorandums of understanding with the United Nations has been expanded and currently includes 19 universities covering the six official languages of the Organization, and all the major regions except Latin America and the Caribbean. Applications from two universities in Latin America are currently under consideration, and informal cooperation has continued between the Department and the two universities, which were invited to nominate candidates for the language internship programme.

58. The Department continued its collaboration with training institutions through the language internship programme. The programme proved to be an effective tool of identifying, attracting and training talented young professionals and directing them to language career paths at the United Nations. In 2011, a vacancy announcement for language internships attracted more than 600 applicants, 65 of whom were hosted by the four duty stations. They represented all six official languages and all language-related occupational groups (27 in New York, 29 in Geneva, 7 in Vienna and 2 in Nairobi). A total of 61 interns were hosted in 2010 (36

in New York, 14 in Geneva, 9 in Vienna and 2 in Nairobi). A number of graduates of the programme have passed language competitive examinations in interpretation and translation and have been recruited in the language services as staff members. The programme also assisted in complementing the pool of qualified language professionals available for temporary appointment and/or contractual translation assignments.

59. The first conference of universities having signed memorandums of understanding was held in May 2011 and was hosted by the University of Salamanca, Spain. Representatives from the universities, the United Nations system and various European institutions held fruitful discussions and agreed on a set of specific actions aimed at strengthening cooperation among the parties in order to find common solutions to issues related to the training of language professionals. The conference will become an annual event. The next conference, to be hosted by the University of Mons, Belgium, in 2012, is expected to formalize the structure of the network of universities having signed memorandums of understanding and determine the modalities of its functioning.

60. During the reporting period, the Department continued to implement planned training activities with an emphasis on translation- and interpretation-specific skills. Effectiveness in the utilization of funds by each beneficiary unit is monitored regularly. The level of resources allocated to training activities in 2011 is roughly equal to that of 2010, and many training requests were denied owing to the shortage of funds.

61. Traineeships constitute another formula for enhancing the pool of qualified language professionals in language combinations that were identified as problematic or critical for succession-planning purposes. In 2009, a pilot programme was conducted in New York in which four candidates identified as promising by an examination board were selected to receive interpreter training in the English booth. All four trainees have since passed the competitive examination for interpreters.

62. The Conference Management Service in Vienna continued its language traineeship programme based on retainer contracting. Trainees are given production quotas to fulfil for the host service, and at the same time benefit from mentoring and feedback from experienced language professionals. In 2010, the Office hosted nine trainees, mostly in translation, and is expecting to host five in 2011. The Interpretation Section in Vienna organized short training sessions in the field of interpretation for selected students, which benefited 115 trainees in 2010 and 134 in 2011.

63. The Department is currently considering options for formalizing a traineeship programme, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 65/245, and strengthening the language internship programme. Full responsibility for administering the internship programmes has recently been transferred from the Office of Human Resources Management to the hosting departments, thus allowing the Department to streamline the posting of internship announcements in Inspira and to have more flexibility in timing internships to avoid their overlap with peak workload periods.

64. The Department's succession-planning efforts are hampered by a lack of budgetary resources and are largely dependent on the voluntary efforts of dedicated language staff, who, for example, combine their home leave with pedagogical

assistance missions. Time spent in training and outreach activities is time not available for regular work, entailing a requirement for replacement staff. Despite its achievements and positive aspects, the programme is close to reaching its limit in terms of the number of training institutions that can be included in the network, the number and scope of pedagogical assistance activities that can be carried out by staff without any financial support and the number of interns who can receive meaningful training in the host language services. The necessity of supporting proactive succession-planning efforts with adequate financing was highlighted by the Joint Inspection Unit in its forthcoming report on the outreach to universities programme, in which it recommends that the legislative bodies of the organizations of the United Nations system ensure that the necessary resources are allocated within the organizations for achieving effective succession planning and dispensing targeted training to candidates for language examinations.

65. Human and financial resources must be in place to enhance outreach and training efforts, to expand and mainstream the traineeship programme, which will strengthen the Department's succession-planning efforts through enhanced collaboration with its partner training institutions, and to train staff once they are on board. Some Member States may also be willing to provide support for training activities related to specific languages. Preliminary enquiries have been made to members of the League of Arab States to ascertain their interest in contributing to the Department's training of Arabic-language translators and interpreters through a trust fund or other arrangement to be put in place by the contributors.

66. The oft-competing demands of productivity, quality, timeliness and cost-effectiveness remain at the cornerstone of document-processing decisions. The highest priority is given to quality, but this approach is unsustainable given the present workload and capacity. Informational meetings are held with Member States, as mandated by the General Assembly (most recently in its resolution 65/245), but attendance remains low.

67. The Department makes full use of contractual translation. The proportion of translation done contractually is increasing, and funds are deployed to match the expected demand. However, problems remain regarding the amount and type of work that can be translated contractually: individual contractors are not guaranteed to be available, and institutional providers, while able to accept large amounts of work, do not provide a sufficiently and consistently high-quality product.

68. Quality control has been given top priority in efforts to ensure a high standard for external translation. A senior reviser and/or focal point for quality control has been designated at the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna. At all duty stations, contractors receive feedback from in-house revisers, in some cases for every job. A global roster of translators and revisers within the Department's contractor management application is updated continually on the basis of input provided by in-house staff on work received from contractors.

69. Efforts to increase quality control for externally processed jobs are hampered by capacity gaps whereby staff cannot be fully dedicated to quality-control functions. In times of increased workload and decreased capacity, staff must perform other required functions, including revision.

70. Owing to the technological advances in the field of document processing and the need to re-engineer workflow in this area, the Department is exploring the

application of computer-assisted translation tools, terminology databases, translation memories and machine translation. This shift to new technology tools will yield benefits in terms of quantity and quality if the necessary investment is made now to procure and test the available tools and to ensure training so that all staff members can become proficient users of the tools.

71. Alternative methods of delivery of summary records was raised in the 2004 report of the Secretary-General on the reform of the Department (A/59/172) and again in his 2005 report on the pattern of conferences (A/60/93). Subsequently, in its resolution 60/236 B of 8 May 2006, the General Assembly called upon the Secretary-General to further elaborate on those proposals. **The Assembly may wish to approve the proposed continuation of the production of summary records in the original language only (English or French), complemented by supplemental systems (e.g., on demand, digital, restricted), to be put in place to meet the needs of Member States.**

72. Treaty body documentation includes submissions by the Secretariat and intergovernmental bodies, which are subject to word limits, and submissions by Member States, which currently are not subject to word limits. In 2010, the latter category of documents showed a 42 per cent increase, to 170 documents, the largest of which was in excess of 87,000 words (approximately 274 pages). It is vital that word limits be respected for all treaty body documentation, which will have a positive impact on the work burden for all concerned. Following the decision of the chairs of the human rights treaty bodies in this regard (see A/65/190, annex II, para. 22), **the General Assembly may wish to further reinforce this proposed course of action**.